

December 10, 2007

## **Alberta increases protection for temporary foreign workers**

### ***Province steps up enforcement measures and opens two advisory offices***

*Edmonton...* The Alberta government has set up two special advisory offices for temporary foreign workers and established a team of inspectors to help ensure they are being treated fairly in their workplaces.

“Temporary foreign workers are helping to fill a critical need in our province. It is essential that they are treated fairly,” said Iris Evans, Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry. “While these workers are protected by the same laws as other Alberta workers, they may be more vulnerable to exploitation. They may, for example, be unfamiliar with Alberta law. The steps we are taking today will allow us to be more proactive in our enforcement activities and will ensure these workers have somewhere to go when they need help.”

The two temporary foreign worker advisory offices, the first of their kind in Canada, will provide one-stop access to information and services for temporary workers. This includes help resolving employment standards or occupational health and safety issues, and other support. Concerns that fall outside employment standards and workplace safety - such as housing issues and illegal recruitment fees - will be referred to and followed up by the appropriate authorities. The offices are located in Edmonton and Calgary and can be accessed by telephone or in person. Each is staffed with two advisors.

In addition, eight experienced employment standards officers - four in Edmonton and four in Calgary - have been appointed to investigate complaints from temporary foreign workers, as well as carry out inspections of companies that employ them. These inspections will ensure foreign workers receive the wages, overtime, general holiday and vacation pay to which they are entitled.

Non-compliance with employment standards could result in orders, audits and/or prosecutions. The majority of employers do comply with the law. Where there are contraventions, most employers tend to work with our officers to correct the situation. Education is a key component of the program. Employers and employees will be offered the opportunity to participate in an employment standards workshop.

The cost of the advisory offices and inspectors is \$1 million annually. An additional \$700,000 will be invested to promote these new services to temporary foreign workers and their employers.

Enhancing employment standards programs is part of Premier Ed Stelmach's plan to secure Alberta's future by building communities, greening our growth and creating opportunity.

**Media enquiries only may be directed to:**

Bart Johnson, Communications  
Employment, Immigration and Industry  
780-427-5649 (office)/780-446-9190 (cell)

Other enquiries please call - 1-877-944-9955

To call toll free within Alberta dial 310-0000.

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## Temporary foreign workers in Alberta

### The role of the advisory office

- Help temporary foreign workers resolve unfair or unsafe conditions by working with other agencies including the federal government, the Workers Compensation Board and community services
- Provide access to translation services
- Assist workers in finding new employers
- Work with immigrant serving agencies and others to encourage reporting of complaints
- Organize and/or facilitate education sessions for temporary foreign workers and their employers

### Office locations

Edmonton – 2nd fl. 10242 – 105 St. and Calgary – 5th fl. 855 – 8 Ave. SW.

To contact either office call 1-877-944-9955.

### The role of the employment standards inspectors

- Investigate complaints from temporary foreign workers and carry out 30 inspections per month
- Ensure temporary foreign workers receive the wages, overtime, general holiday and vacation pay to which they are entitled
- Work with employers to achieve compliance with employment standards including inviting employers and employees to attend employment standard workshops
- Refer employees and employers to other agencies such as occupational health and safety

### Alberta's labour market

- In November 2007, Alberta had the lowest unemployment rate in Canada at 3.6%
- In 2006, 22,393 temporary foreign workers were working in Alberta, compared to 9,166 in 2000
- In 2006, 20,561 immigrants came to Alberta, compared to 14,363 in 2000

### The top 10 occupations filled by temporary foreign workers in Alberta in 2006

1. Babysitters, nannies and parent's helpers
2. General farm workers
3. Professional occupations in business services to management
4. Light duty cleaners
5. Steamfitters, pipefitters and sprinkler system installers
6. Truck drivers
7. Cooks
8. Food service counter attendants and food preparers
9. Skilled welders
10. Post-secondary teaching and research assistants

### Government responsibilities

Responsibility for legislation enforcement is shared among federal and provincial government agencies. Alberta Employment, Immigration and Industry is primarily concerned with issues such as the non-payment of wages, unauthorized paycheck deductions, overtime and hours of work, and occupational health and safety issues.

Alberta Advanced Education and Technology is responsible for trades certification and Service Alberta is concerned with the licensing of and fees charged by employment agencies.

Federal agencies set the conditions for employers who hire foreign workers, issue work permits and respond to accusation of employers holding on to workers' passports, false claims of automatic permanent residency, deportation threats and illegal immigration.

### **Employer responsibilities**

In addition to complying with Alberta's labour laws, employers must provide temporary foreign workers in low skilled occupations with transportation to and from Canada, medical coverage until the worker is eligible for the Alberta Health Care Insurance Plan, assistance in settling into the community and confirmation of the availability of affordable and suitable accommodation.

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